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UNIVERSAL TRAINING AND THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL ¹

GEORGE CREEL

ULTRA-MILITARISTS and ultra-pacifists, blind to everything but their prejudices and preconceptions, are alike guilty of blasphemy against facts. A world war does not carry the conclusion that the United States will be attacked either today or tomorrow, but it does declare the truth that civilization has not yet reached that stage of spiritual development where peace may be trusted to moral suasion. War is not something that *will* come, but something that *may* come; and insistence that plans for national defense shall be based upon the imminence of war is no greater folly than insistence that national defense shall be disregarded wholly.

What the majority of Americans are seeking today is some sound program of preparedness which will treat war as a contingency, not as a dread certainty, permitting full adherence to the democratic ideal without surrender of prudence. The one answer is the adoption of a system of universal training that will give finer expression to the aspirations of democracy even while providing for its defensive needs.

The volunteer system has been attended at every step by waste and failure, draining the national treasury of two billion dollars in ten years and contributing to farce and tragedy in equal degree. It is history that fifty per cent of all volunteers are rejected because of their unfitness, while of those accepted, fully one-half die, before the firing line is reached, by reason of their utter lack of stamina. Even today, when only the supposedly fit are offering themselves for enlistment, just one out of every six applicants for the army and the navy it is found possible to accept. In the Civil War and in

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the war with Spain, thousands died from their inability to stand physical strain, and other thousands blundered on to death through their own ignorance or the incapacity of untrained leaders. The greed that expresses itself in embalmed beef and paper-soled shoes is an inevitable consequence of the confusion that attends eleventh-hour preparedness.

It is the lesson of the past that every country, in every great war, has had to resort to conscription because of the cowardice or indifference that hides at home while bravery and patriotism make their sacrifices of blood upon the battle-field. The question for the United States to decide is whether this step shall be taken in the day of pressing need, when precious time must be lost in winnowing and drilling, or when years of peace permit a slow, scientific process that may be made to conserve democratic ideals and strengthen civic virtues.

No greater proof of prejudice's power to becloud could be had than the manner in which the pacifists have overlooked the utter unfairness and utter undemocracy of the volunteer system. It rests, in effect, upon the proposition that the national defense is not a duty that is owed, but a favor to be conferred; that it is right and just for the nation to ask of one citizen what it does not ask of another; and that the brave and patriotic must bear double burden by reason of the evasions of the craven and the traitor.

On the other hand, universal training declares equitably that the protection of the republic constitutes a natural and inescapable obligation of citizenship, making equal call upon the high and the low, the rich and the poor, disregarding class and taking no account of circumstance. Instead of meaning militarism, it is the one sure escape from militarism, for it will eventually do away with all need for a standing army and destroy utterly the propaganda of the militarists. It is inconceivable that men and women who profess to believe in democracy should be fighting this sane, orderly plan, even while upholding the volunteer system, which reeks with graft, inequality and discrimination.

The outcry against "compulsion" affords another instance of muddy thinking. At every point in our national life, com-

pulsion is seen as an active, driving force. We compel our children to go to school; we compel observance of health, sanitary and fire laws; we compel observance of the rights of property and the sacredness of life; in a word, if compulsion were taken away, chaos would ensue. There is this difference, however, between the compulsions of a monarchy and the compulsions of a democracy. The one proceeds from the whim of kings, the other from the voice of a people. To apply this established principle to the national defense is no more than a further expression of the majority agreement that decides upon the action best fitted to advance and protect the nation, the state, the city and the individual.

The evils alleged against the adoption of a system of universal training are prophesied, not proved. The benefits are many and obvious. Switzerland, and our own state of Wyoming, testify alike to a finer, firmer physical base, an improved national health, a nobler conception of patriotism, a keener understanding of civic obligations and the meaning of fraternity, and a far saner, more wholesome outlook on life in every possible way.

In such systems as the Australian and the Swiss, where is there hint of militarism or menace to democratic institutions? Youthful training that is part and parcel of the educational process, and dominated by educational ideals! A brief yearly service that does not dislocate industry, but strengthens it!

The Americanization of these systems, as exemplified by the Welsh-Slater measures in the state of New York, contemplates even shorter instruction periods than either Switzerland or Australia. Commencing at the age of eight, boys and girls alike in the elementary and secondary schools are to be given physical training along lines laid down by a commission made up of a representative of the school authorities, a representative of the militia, and a representative of the people.

Boys from sixteen to nineteen will receive military instruction for periods aggregating not more than three hours each week during the school year, and in summer field camps requiring an attendance of two weeks. This comes close to the

Wyoming method, where, for four years, the training of youth has been carried on with results that justify every hope and refute every prophecy of gloom and prejudice.

The people of Wyoming cannot truthfully be called "militarists". Its voters, as a matter of fact, are much the same sort as those of Nebraska, where Mr. Ford ran so remarkably in a presidential primary. When the training idea was first broached, every bitter word was said against it that is now being said in New York, yet today pacifists, parents, teachers, labor unions and educators unite in praising the plan as fine, democratic and absolutely desirable. Wyoming found that it was not necessary to make soldiers in order to manufacture fit defenders, and discovered also that the same methods that produced a minute-man also produced a better individual and a more intelligent, interested citizen.

America is not a fit nation by any means. Of the thirty million wage-earners in the United States, each loses an average of nine days a year through sickness, a wage loss of \$500,000,000, not to take account of the millions spent in medical attendance and lost in the curtailment of productivity. Six hundred thousand people die annually from preventable disease, among them being 150,000 infants sent to death by ignorance and neglect.

It is not alone that universal training will necessarily instruct in sanitation and personal hygiene, but the emphasis on physical development is bound to hurry the social legislation that will do away with slums, low wages, over-work and the other evils that flow from economic maladjustment. A more vigorous mind goes with a more vigorous body. Australia reports that her system of universal training has greatly reduced juvenile delinquency, and in Switzerland the murder rate is twelve per million, as against one hundred and twenty-four per million in the United States. The cadet system in Wyoming is responsible for an amazing development in juvenile self-control and restraint.

Another tremendous benefit lies in the complete elimination of class distinctions and class lines. Snobbery finds it impossible to live in the democratic atmosphere of a cadet corps,

for just as every squad has its weak and strong, so is it made up of the rich and the poor, the Fauntleroyes and the Smikes. The fraternal instinct flowers inevitably, and every youngster grows up in the understanding that no group, whether it be a cadet company, a city, a state or a nation, is stronger than its weakest member.

As I conceive universal training, it is not only an adequate preparation for the defense of the nation against armed invasion or unbearable aggression, but an even finer preparation for the daily demands of citizenship. As it is today, democracy is the emptiest, stalest word in the English language. We teach our youth to talk it in a vague way, but not how to work at it in a definite way. Radicalism has so fallen into the ruts of an habitual antagonism that it has lost all power of positiveness. The so-called champions of the democratic ideal are so busy being *against* things that they have no time to be *for* things.

Great economies will be effected through universal training, for with every fit citizen ready to answer the call to arms, there will not be even a shadow of a need for the forty-eight army posts that are now maintained by congressmen more concerned with the golden drip from the national honey-barrel than with common sense and common honesty. To fit its citizen army of 500,000 for mobilization within forty-eight hours, Switzerland spends about \$8,000,000 a year, while the people of the United States spend over \$100,000,000 for an army of less than one hundred thousand.

Educational authorities and social workers, as a matter of course, will have a voice in the establishment of the training courses, and it is inconceivable that they will not insist that all emphasis be placed on national defense and none at all on national aggression. War and valor and militancy—great and shining words that have been led away into a slavery of false meanings—will be restored to truth by proper teaching, so that we may see them express man's hatred of evil and not man's stupid hatred of man.

It is not militarism that universal training involves, but pacificism with foundations under it. Preparation for the

national defense, when confided to the people as a whole, will rob the military clique of all power and eventually destroy it entirely. The very confidence engendered would have a vital and helpful effect upon the nation itself and the national character. Brag and bluster and hysteria, when analyzed, are seen to be the natural consequences of unpreparedness or semi-preparedness. The country that does not know whether it can fight or not is always a country that lends itself to extremes of bravado and alarm; and did the United States know itself to be ready for any emergency, it would be difficult indeed for a yellow press and still yellower politicians to work up emotional debauches by preaching a religion of valor based upon blood lust.

As things stand, we have spent \$250,000,000 a year for the last ten years on our national defense, receiving small return on the investment except in greed, graft, intrigue and the growth of a financial-militaristic-political combine that poisons the wells of democracy. In order to resist an extension of the present policy—and their resistance is already seen to be futile—the ultra-pacifists are put in the position of standing for the things that are. They champion existing evils because they fear larger evils; they are willing to perpetuate stupidity and undemocracy because they have no faith in the ability of the people to control change; they cannot see that there is anything else in the world but frying pans and fires. In the last analysis, those who fight universal training because they have neither courage nor faith, are as much the foes of democracy as those wretched persons who talk in terms of blood and iron.